Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 DODE-00 CIAE-00
INRE-00 /026 W
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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9823
INFO USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 06306

EXDIS

USSALTTWO

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UR, US, SALT
SUBJECT: SALT: BACKFIRE MID-AIR REFUELING CAPABILITIES

1. DURING HIS MEETING MARCH 29 WITH HASC MEMBERS, SOVIET FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE OGARKOV DISCUSSED IN SOME DETAIL THE QUESTION OF BACKFIRE RANGE AND REFUELING CAPABILITIES. THE OBJECT OF HIS REMARKS WAS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT BACKFIRE WAS INCAPABLE OF ACCOMPLISHING A STRATEGIC MISSION. WE REPORT THESE REMARKS PRIMARILY BECAUSE THEY SEEM TO US TO GIVE SOME SPECIFICS ABOUT BACKFIRE REFUELING CAPABILITIES WHICH MAY BE DF INTEREST TO THE DEPARTMENT AND TO USDEL SALT.

2. OGARKOV RESPONDED TO A SPECIFIC QUESTION ON THE BACKFIRE BOMBER POSED BY REPRESENTATIVE SAMUEL STRATTON OF NEW YORK. HE DISCUSSED THE CONTENTION BY SOME IN THE U.S. THAT WITH MID-AIR REFUELING THE BACKFIRE COULD REACH THE UNITED STATES. HE SAID THAT ITS "RADIUS OF ACTION" IS 2200 KM AND BY THIS HE SPECIFICALLY DID NOT MEAN THAT THIS WAS ITS "RANGE." HE NOTED THAT THE
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NEAREST POINTKOETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IS 5500 KM. WITH MID-AIR REFUELING THE BACKFIRE IS "CAPABLE OF ADDING" ONLY ONE-THIRD TO ITS FUEL SUPPLY WHICH THEREFORE WOULD GIVE IT A "RADIUS" OF ABOUT 3000 KM. EVEN WITH A SECOND REFUELING, HE SAID, THE BACKFIRE COULD NOT REACH THE UNITED STATES. MOREOVER, HE SAID THAT MODERN AIR DEFENSES ARE SUCH THAT THE BACKFIRE TYPE OF AIRCRAFT

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WOULD NOT BE CAPABLE OF PENETRATING AND ACCOMPLISHING A STRATEGIC MISSION. THUS, HE CONCLUDED, THAT IT IS TIME TO PUT TO REST THE BACKFIRE ISSUE WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "AN EMPTY QUESTION."

3. COMMENT. OGARKOV SEEMED TO BE SUGGESTING THAT THE MID-AIR REFUELING SYSTEM ON THE BACKFIRE BOMBER IS SUCH THAT ONLY ONE-THIRD OF ITS FUEL TANK CAPACITY CAN BE REFILLED WHILE IN FLIGHT. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT SPECIFICALLY MAKE THIS STATEMENT. WHETHER OR NOT ABOVE INFORMATION IS NEW OR SIGNIFICANT, WE LEAVE TO AN EVALUATION BY THE DEPARTMENT AND USDEL SALT EXPERTS. TOON

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